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SUBJECT: GUINEA - NARCO-TRAFFICKING CRACKDOWN BONANZA

REF: 08 CONAKRY 184

Classified By: RSO Philip Nazelrod for reasons 1.4 (B) and (C)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Agents of the Ministry of High Crimes and Anti-Drugs recently moved to arrest several suspected narcotics traffickers, including kingpin Mamady Kallo, Ousmane Conte, the eldest son of former Guinean President Lansana Conte and four high-ranking police officers. The Red Beret military unit, once the protectors of Guinean drug lords, have led the way in recent arrests. The criminal probe extends well into the Ministry of Security but seems to be noticeably avoiding the Ministry of Defense. These bold and public actions may be a welcome move, but the underlying motivation remains decidedly unclear. END SUMMARY

Removing a Keystone

¶2. (S) In January 2009, agents of the Ministry of High Crimes and Anti-Drugs (hereafter Ministry) arrested suspected Guinean narcotics kingpin Mamady Kallo. Kallo is a keystone figure suspected of masterminding the narcotics trade in Guinea. Detained at the military camp and CNDD headquarters Camp Alpha Yaya in Conakry, Kallo has yet to be charged with drug offenses and is reportedly the target of intense interrogation. Sources claim that suspected partner and fellow narco-trafficker Charles Pascal Tolno visited Kallo at Camp Alpha Yaya and was summarily arrested.

¶3. (S) On February 7, RSO and ECON officer met with Minister Moussa Tiegboro Camara to discuss Kallo's arrest. Camara appeared hesitant and defensive when questioned about the events surrounding Kallo's arrest and subsequent interrogation. However, he quickly identified the need for USG assistance, notably DEA, and stated that he would ask permission from CNDD President Moussa Dadis Camara to answer questions pertaining to Kallo. On February 13, President Camara interrogated Kallo on local television and radio stations. The interrogation specifically targeted Kallo's narcotics operations but revealed little information.

A Clean Sweep?

¶4. (C) On February 20, the CNDD summoned four high-ranking civilian law enforcement officers to the Ministry of Security headquarters in Conakry, Guinea. The four officers were subsequently arrested by a detachment of approximately 25 Red Beret military soldiers acting under orders of Tiegboro Camara of the Ministry. Those arrested include (a) Sekou Mohamed Bangoura, former National Director of Police (b) El Hadj Bakary Thermite Marah, former Director of Office of Anti-Drugs (OCAD) (c) Victor Traore, Director of Economic Crimes (ORDEF) and (d) Mamady Mansare, former Inspector General. All four officers were taken to military camp Alpha Yaya for interrogation. Both Bangoura and Marah,

in May 2008, used their ranking positions to obfuscate the true nature of the publicized destruction of seized narcotics by the Guinean National Committee Against Drugs (see reftel).

Embassy doubts that the GoG destroyed the 400kg of seized cocaine as reported; a sample collected by the USG for testing revealed that the product destroyed was something other than cocaine.

15. (C) On February 23, the Ministry summoned to Camp Alpha Yaya for questioning three current and former high-level officials of the Ministry of Security: (a) Dr. Ibrahima Bah, current Inspector General of the Police and former director of Anti-Narcotic Office (OCAD) (b) Alpha Ousmane Balde, current director of the Brigade Anti-Criminal (BAC) and former deputy director of the National Police and (c) Mamadou Beau Keita, former Minister of Security who officiated over the May 2008 supposed drug destruction.

Netting a Big Fish

16. (C) On February 23, the Ministry arrested Ousmane Conte, eldest son of former Guinean President Lansana Conte. Ousmane Conte is widely suspected of facilitating the narcotics trade in Guinea. Sources believe Conte worked in concert with Kallo to construct a trafficking empire extending throughout and beyond Guinea. On February 26, CNDD President Dadis Camara paraded Conte on television and radio. Conte appeared sick and under medical care) ostensibly suffering from narcotics withdrawal. The disposition of Conte,s brothers, Ansou Conte and Moussa Conte, is unclear. Unconfirmed reports indicate that both are in detention alongside Ousmane.

The Red Berets - Friend or Foe?

17. (C) The military group once charged with the protection of the president, identified by their unique Red Berets, remain undefined. Today, the Red Berets have four distinct divisions and under a central Regimental Command led by Captain Bah : (a) Chinese government trained Red Berets from Kindia , led by Captain Malike Diakite (b) Presidential Guards, led by Minister of Presidential Security, Minister Claude Pivi (c) Brigade Anti-Terrorism (BATA), led by Major Boundouka Conde and (d) Ranger Battalion, led by Major Edourd (NOTE: Pivi was the leader of the military mutiny in May 2008. END NOTE).

18. (S) Prior to the coup d'etat, Ousmane Conte commanded a company of Red Berets. Most likely, Conte used these soldiers to protect his narco-trafficking enterprises. Following the coup, these Red Berets were folded into the newly formed Ministry of Presidential Security led by Minister Pivi. Throughout January and February 2009, soldiers wearing Red Berets raided several commercial concerns throughout Conakry, particularly businesses owned by international companies. On February 12, RSO interviewed Major Ibrahima Balde, Chief of Staff of the Gendarme assigned to police the military. When asked if he is policing the Red Berets, Balde responded that there are other dynamics at play and he hopes to &resolve8 them soon. (NOTE: The other, dynamics at play presumably refers directly to Pivi. END NOTE).

COMMENT: Road to Glory or Road to Perdition?

19. (C) The arrest of kingpin Mamady Kallo appears to have set in motion a nationwide sweep of suspected and actual narco-traffickers. While Kallo appears to have attempted to purchase his freedom, his public interrogation by President Dadis revealed the CNDD,s willingness to forego bribes and target specific narco-trafficking enterprises. Furthermore, it is highly likely that Kallo has named many individuals

involved in the criminal activity and both recent and future arrests) particularly Ousmane Conte,s -- are predicated on the information he provided.

¶10. (S) The particular motivation underpinning the bold arrests remains unclear. The CNDD may be attempting to curry favor from the international community which has repeatedly condemned the freedom of narco-trafficking in Guinea. By arresting select high-profile individuals, they make a case for international support and recognition. The CNDD may be attempting to make good on its promise to have and sustain a drug-free country) a core tenant of the CNDD which generates much public support. The lack, however, of arrests of current members of the CNDD or ranking members of the military (although two military officers assigned to the military pharmacy were recently arrested) provides for the very real possibility that these arrests are designed simply to remove the current narco-traffickers in favor of a new ones.

¶11. (S//NF) It's too early to tell how wide the investigative net is at this time and whether or not the net will extend into the Ministry of Defense. Various reporting sources tell of a significant number of more arrests still to be made from within the Ministry of Security alone. Additionally, sources claim the Ministry is currently crafting the operational plans designed to scrub the military rank and file of suspected traffickers. How much Teflon Claude Pivi retains remains unknown.

¶12. (C) Although the CNDD is arresting people right and left, the justice system remains ineffective. It is unclear how these detainees will ultimately be tried and sentenced given the lack of government resources and institutional challenges. The Justice Minister, however, told DCM February 26, that his ministry is prepared to prosecute the narco-traffickers, but requested U.S. technical assistance to go through with effective prosecution. He assured DCM that all suspected narco-traffickers currently in detention are being well-treated (see septel). Other contacts suggest that the CNDD is hoping to turn these narco-traffickers over to international courts rather than attempting to handle the cases locally.

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